

Mental Illness

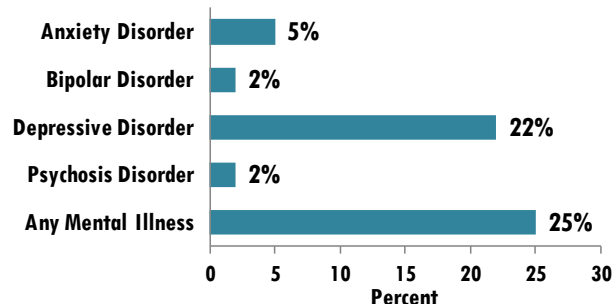
Mental Illnesses are “health conditions that are characterized by altered mood, thoughts and/or behaviors associated with distress or impaired functioning (DHHS, 1999).” Some common types of mental illnesses are: post-traumatic stress disorder, depressive disorder, and Alzheimer's disease. Mental illness is more common than many realize; in the US, one in four adults experience a mental illness in the course of a year (Kessler, 2005). The number of people living with HIV disease and a mental illness is unknown. Surveillance is difficult as mental illnesses often go undiagnosed and represent a vast continuum, from short-term to lifelong struggles. In the US, prevalence rates of HIV among adults with serious and persistent mental illness have been reported to be between 4% and 23%, compared to an overall range of 0.3% to 0.4% in the general population (Cournos, 1997).

MEDICAL MONITORING PROJECT

In Virginia, the Medical Monitoring Project (MMP), an ongoing, population-based surveillance system, assesses the health-related behaviors, clinical outcomes and needs of HIV-infected adults receiving medical care. Data on mental illness are collected through a participant interview and a linked medical record abstraction. During the interview, participants are asked the Patient Health Questionnaire-8 (PHQ) to measure depression in the last two weeks. The PHQ is one of the most widely used and validated instruments to measure depression (CDC, 2011). The medical record abstractions document diagnosed mental illnesses listed in the medical chart since testing positive for HIV until 12 months before the interview.

In 2009, over 350 medical records were abstracted and 132 interviews were completed. Twenty-five percent of participants had a diagnosed mental illness documented in the medical chart, with depressive disorders being the most common (22%). Results from the PHQ indicate that 21% of interviewed participants reported being depressed in the previous two weeks[^]. Depressive symptoms

Diagnosed Mental Illness during the Medical History Period*, MMP 2009



were higher among females than males (26% versus 18%).

HIV disease is a significant mental burden. Those with HIV often suffer from anxiety and depression as they adjust to the difficulties of living with a chronic life-threatening illness, complicated therapeutic regimens, stigmatization, and possible loss of social support. HIV patients with severe mental illness have a slower rate of HIV viral suppression and experience more problems with HIV care than those without severe mental illness (Pence, 2007; Freemont, 2007). The MMP findings highlight the importance of mental health screening and treatment as an integrated component of HIV care.

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- *Medical History Period is the first medical care visit after HIV diagnosis to 12 months before the MMP interview or first contact attempt if no interview.
- [^] Current depression was measured using a PHQ-8 score ≥ 10